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AUTHOR Neukam, Beth; Gilman, David A.
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ABSTRACT

A study examined students' achievement increases to determine whether improvement resulted from spending a longer amount of time on language arts. Subjects of the study were 149 freshmen who attended Northeast Dubois Middle and High Schools in Indiana. During the eighth grade, 77 of those students had one 45-minute language arts period in 1992 and the other 72 had two 45-minute periods of language arts the following year. The comparison was based on reading, language, and total battery scores from the statewide Indiana Test for Educationasl Progress (ISTEP); a one-tailed t-test was used to determine the significance of the scores. Results indicated that there was a significant difference in language at the .01 level, and no significant difference in reading or total battery scores at the .05 level. Findings suggest that increasing the amount of time spent in language arts instruction may be a viable way to increase student achievement. (One table of data is included, contains five references.) (Author/CR)

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Language Arts Instruction Time

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Beth Neukam

and

David A. Gilman

Indiana State University

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine whether students' achievement increases as a result of increased language arts time during the school day. The sample used in this study was 149 freshmen. Seventy-seven students had one 45 minute language arts period, and the other 72 students had two 45 minute periods of language arts in eighth grade. The comparison was based on reading, language, and total battery scores from the ISTEP test. A one-tailed t-test was used to determine the significance of the scores. The results of the language scores were significant at the .01 level. The results of the reading and total battery were not significant at the .05 level.

Background of the Problem

In 1992, students at Northeast Dubois Middle School were given one 45 minute period of instruction for language arts. One semester was spent on literature, vocabulary, and spelling, and the following semester was spent on grammar and writing. Teachers and administrators decided that more time was required to adequately cover all of the areas of language arts. Therefore, the following year, the school corporation hired another language arts teacher, and students were given two 45 minute periods of language arts. One period was spent on grammar and writing, and the other period was spent on literature and vocabulary. Thus, school day includes two periods of language arts at this time for all grades in the Northeast Dubois Middle School.

Teachers at the School felt that having two language arts periods is beneficial for the students. They also agreed that teaching all of the areas of language arts in one period of the day is very difficult.

Keith Wortinger, principal of Dubois Middle School, believes that increase in the amount of instruction time in a given area will yield positive results. He stated that he thinks it is necessary to continue the two periods of language arts.

The idea of having increased time spent on language arts is not just a localized idea. Many people believe that students will benefit from more language arts time. Middle school teachers at other middle schools believe that their students would benefit if their school would increase the time spent on language arts. They now have 46 minutes of language arts per school day. Although she says teachers are trying hard to improve the way they teach, their students' scores actually decreased from the previous

year. She further stated that there is "not enough time for our students who are economically underprivileged." She believes that two language arts classes per day are needed to increase test-scores.

Joseph Murphy (1992) found that students who spend more time actively engaged in academic activities experience a higher rate of achievement. Students need ample time in the language arts classroom to read and discuss literature, to write, and to communicate. Murphy states that the "allocated academic time", which is the amount of instructional time devoted to English, literature, and other subjects, is important to engage student activity.

Reading is a subject that is important because every other subject relies upon the ability to read and comprehend. One cannot excel in math, science, or any other field if he or she cannot comprehend material relative to that subject.

Fielding and Pearson (1994) believe that two major benefits occur from reading text material. First, practice makes perfect. The more one practices reading, the better one becomes at it. Second, reading brings new knowledge to the reader. The more one reads and comprehends on his or her own, the more and broader array of information the person can understand and retain. Fielding and Pearson further state that there is a positive relationship between amount of time spent reading and reading comprehension. This relationship may be attributed to the knowledge base that increases because students are reading more text material. Students should be given time in class to silently read material that interests them to spur on good reading habits. If teachers are

only given one language arts class period, then they will not be as inclined to give students time for silent reading.

Today, the technologies that are available for use in language arts are countless. Students need to have enough time to become familiar with computers and all they have to offer. Hancock and Betts (1994) state, "Schools widely use word processing programs to develop students' composition, editing, and revision skills, and it appears that students with a high degree of access to the programs do write more and better."

Computers are interesting to many students and this encourages them to write more. Students need enough time to work in the computer lab and become comfortable working on the computer.

Another development in education today is incorporating a writing workshop in the English classroom. Lucy Calkins (1994) believes that students engaged in a writing workshop learn writing and grammar most efficiently. She states that students need a block of time set aside each day for a freestanding writing workshop, and the workshop should be conducted throughout the year. The writing workshop is student-focused. Students write about a topic of their choice, then they edit, revise, share with classmates and their teacher, and finally publish their work. The teacher monitors student activity and teaches mini-lessons to help students with grammar skills. To conduct an effective writing workshop, students need to be engaged in writing for a block of time every day all year long. Schools that use writing workshops need two periods of language arts each day: one period for the writing workshop and one period for reading.

Whole language and literature based programs have also emerged. John O'Neil states that the difference between literature based and traditional instruction is that literature based surrounds students in whole pieces of literature, and that reading skills are taught in the context of real literature. To accomplish implementing whole language, teachers and students need adequate time to explore and discuss the literature. To be even more effective, students should be given back-to-back language arts classes. If students are given ample time in the language arts classroom, then student achievement should increase.

Statement of the Problem

The general statement of the problem is, "Which of the two classes will have higher scores in language arts ISTEP scores?" The specific statement is, "Does increased language arts instruction improve ISTEP scores?" The hypothesis is, "Students that receive 90 minutes of language arts instruction will perform better on the ISTEP test than students that receive 45 minutes of language arts instruction."

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects for this study were freshmen who attended Northeast Dubois Middle and High Schools. The sample used in this study was 149 freshmen. Seventy-seven students were in the year that had one 45 minute class and 72 students were in the group that had two 45 minute classes. These students come from rural surroundings and from

low to middle income families. The majority of the students at Northeast Dubois are of average intelligence.

Materials

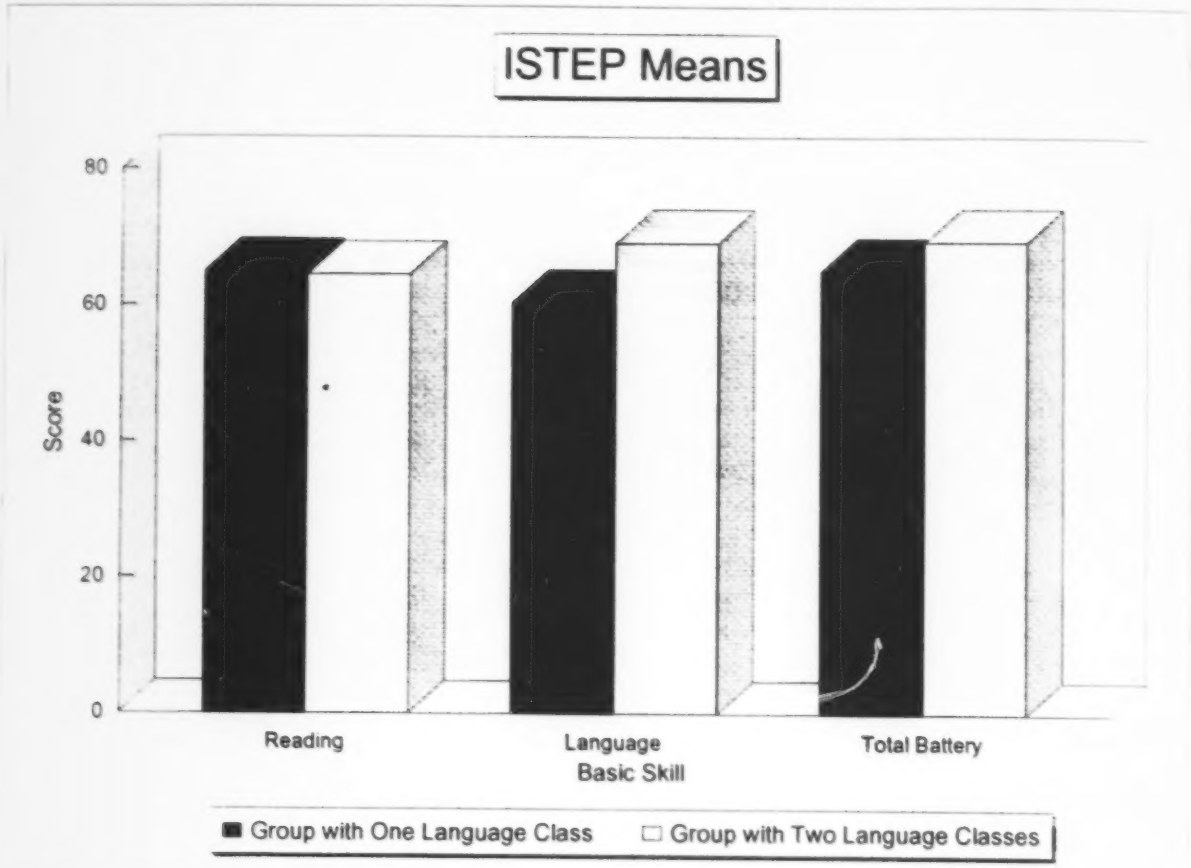
The comparison of this study was based on the reading, language, and total battery scores of the ISTEP test. The Indiana state-wide test for Educational Progress (ISTEP) is a standardized test that tests students' reading, language, and math skills.

The design used in this study was a cohort study. This is a study which compares one group which has received a treatment, increased language arts time, to another group which has not received a treatment, one period of language arts. In figuring the significance of the scores, a one-tailed t-test was used. The results of this test were then analyzed to see if they had significance at the .05 and .01 levels.

Results

The results of this study on the time spent in the language arts classroom indicate that the language scores had a t-score of 2.5778, the reading scores of -.09, and the total battery had a t-score of 1.27. When these scores were compared to the critical values of t, the following discoveries took place. First, there was a significant difference in language at the .01 level. Second, there was no significant difference in the reading or total battery scores at the .05 level.

The group with increased time in language arts had significantly better scores in language, and there was not a significant difference in reading and the total battery.



ISTEP Means

	Reading	Language	Total Battery
Group with One Language Class	64.9	60.4	65.1
Group with Two Language Classes	64.6	69.3	69.5

Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

The results of this language arts instruction time study indicate that there is a significant difference in students' achievement in the language portion of the ISTEP test. It also indicates that there is not a significant difference in students' achievement in the reading portion or the total battery of the ISTEP test. This conclusion was drawn after examining students' reading, language, and total battery scores. Therefore, because the results are significant in the language portion, it is possible to accept the directional hypothesis.

Increasing the amount of time spent in language arts instruction may be a viable way to increase student achievement. Teachers are given adequate time to teach the many different areas of language arts in various ways. Teachers can teach by using whole language, computers, incorporate a writing workshop, have students read more text material, silently read, or by other methods. Being skillful in reading, writing, and speech is vital for all students, regardless of their field of endeavor. Consequently, educators must do what they can to attain the highest level of achievement possible.

It is recommended that further research in this area be conducted. A limitation of this study is that only two groups of students were sampled. A more thorough testing of the hypothesis would include numerous groups of students over time.

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